DARK HORSE MAVERICK

3 of 9

frank MILLER

HELL and BACK

A SIN CITY love story

frank **MILLER** *story & art*

lynn **VARLEY** *cover colors*

diana **schutz** *editor*

cary **GRAZZINI** *designer*

mike **RICHARDSON** *publisher*

DON'T TAKE THIS PERSONAL, BOY, BUT YOU MIGHT JUST BE OFF YOUR NUT.

YOU DON'T KNOW HER **LAST NAME.** YOU DON'T KNOW HER **ADDRESS.** YOU GOT NO **PICTURE** OF HER. WHAT YOU **GOT** IS YOUR OWN BEAT-UP **TENNIS SHOE.**

I'LL DO WHAT I **CAN,** BUT YOU GOTTA **UNDERSTAND** YOU'RE NOT GIVING ME ONE WHOLE HELL OF A LOT TO **WORK** WITH.

I UNDER-STAND. I'M GRATEFUL FOR WHATEVER HELP YOU CAN GIVE ME.

"HELP"? YOU JUST LEAVE THIS JOB TO THE **EXPERTS,** JUNIOR. STAY OUT OF OUR **WAY.**

WHAT THE HELL YOU **DOING** THERE, SONNY?

YOU WANTED A PICTURE OF HER.

YEAH, SURE. BUT I AIN'T **MADE** OUT OF **TIME.**

JAY-- YOU ARE **QUITE** THE **ARTISTE!**

THIS CHANGES **EVERYTHING. THIS** I CAN **WORK** WITH. I'LL CIRCULATE IT TO EVERY COP IN THE **STATE--** PUT MY **BEST MEN** ON THE CASE.

YOU JUST RUN ON HOME, NOW. WAIT TO HEAR FROM US.

NO, SIR. I WON'T. WITH OR WITHOUT YOUR HELP-- I'M GOING TO FIND HER.

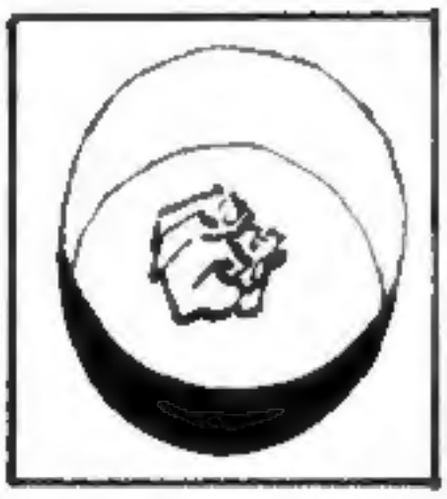
DON'T GO INTERFERING WITH A POLICE INVESTIGATION, SQUIRT.

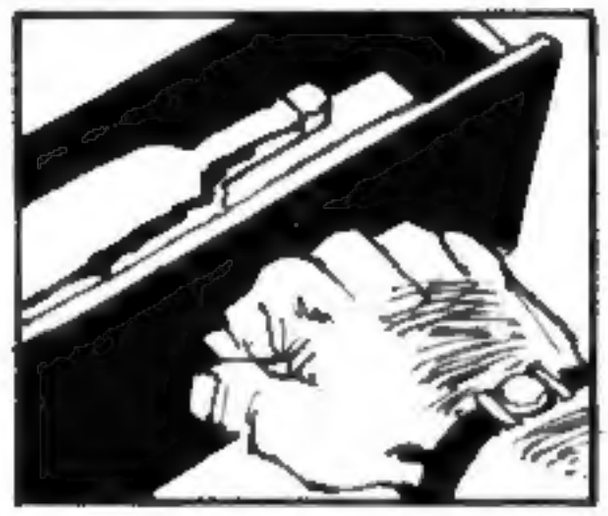
I'M ONLY TELLING YOU ONCE.

CRMPPL CRUNCH CRNCH

PATCH ME THROUGH TO MANSON, HILDY.

YES, SIR.





SON OF A BITCH. WHAT KIND OF TOWN'S HE THINK HE LIVES IN?

SON OF A BITCH. I GOT A WIFE AND KIDS TO THINK ABOUT.

BRINGG!

MANSON HERE, LIEUTENANT.

GET THE BOYS TOGETHER. I GOT A JOB FOR YOU.

YES, SIR!

SON OF A BITCH...

EEEEEEEE

EEEEEEEE

POLICE

POLICE

YOU ***REMEM-BER*** ME, LONGHAIR?

I REMEMBER YOU, MANSON. AND I'VE TAKEN QUITE ENOUGH FROM YOU.

TALK ***SWEET.*** SWEAR ON YOUR MOMMA'S ***GRAVE*** YOU'RE GONNA KEEP YOUR BUTT OUT OF THE ***MISSING PERSONS*** BUSINESS--

--AND ***MAYBE*** WE'LL LEAVE YOU STILL ABLE TO ***WALK.***

I'LL BE ABLE TO WALK. BUT YOU'LL BE A MESS IF YOU DON'T GET THAT STICK OUT OF MY FACE.

OOOH! I DO ***BELIEVE*** THE MAN IS LOOKING TO DO THE ***RODNEY!***

I'VE GIVEN YOU FAIR WARNING. BACK OFF.

HAVE IT YOUR OWN WAY, THEN.

OOF!

POP

GAA

DAMN!

UNFF!

AAAA

AAAA

HEFF HEFF

HUFF

HOOF!

GAAA

WHUH

WHUH

HENFF

HUNFF

SON

SON OF A

GYAA

B

STILL AWAKE, MANSON?

LONGHAIR FAGGOT. GO AHEAD. DO YOUR WORST.

YOU DON'T WANT TO SEE MY WORST

SLEEP

BASIN CITY'S FINEST THEY'RE ***LOADED*** WITH CASH. I COULD PAY MY RENT TWICE OVER

LUCKY FOR ME, I'VE ONLY GOT TO PAY IT ***ONCE***-- WHICH LEAVES ME A SOLID ***GRAND*** TO SPARE

I'LL NEED IT

WHATEVER'S GOING ON, THE ***COPS*** ARE WORKING FOR THE ***ENEMY.***

THAT MAKES THE GAME ***TRICKY***-- BUT EVERY CLUE ***HELPS.***

I ***WILL*** FIND YOU, ESTHER.

WHEREVER YOU ARE

UNNHH

WHERE AM I?
WHERE AM I?
OH, GOD WHERE AM I?

YOU'RE NOWHERE.

YOU'RE NOTHING.

YOU'RE NOBODY.

YOU DON'T EXIST.

FOUR OF MY BEST MEN --AND HE TOOK THEM OUT LIKE THEY WERE CUB SCOUTS. NONE OF THEM GOT SO MUCH AS A SHOT OFF

BLAGG

MUST BE SOME KINDA MARINE, HUH?

NAVY SEAL, ACTUALLY. A WAR HERO AWARDED THE MEDAL OF HONOR.

I DON'T CARE IF HE WON THE DAMN NOBEL PEACE PRIZE. AIN'T NOBODY GETS AWAY WITH GIVING MY BOYS THAT KINDA POUND-ING IT'S HELL ON MORALE.

I'M BRINGING HIM DOWN HARD.

YOU'LL DO NOTHING OF THE SORT. I WON'T RISK THE EXPO-SURE.

LEAVE HIM TO MY PEOPLE

I'M NOT ABOUT TO START **ARGUING** --NOT WITH **YOU**, COLONEL YOU'VE DONE WAY TOO GOOD BY ME

PRAY I NEVER DO **BAD** BY YOU, LIEBOWITZ

YOU'LL DESTROY ALL RECORDS OF THE INCIDENT-- AND, OF COURSE, HIS INITIAL REPORT YOU'LL SWEAR YOUR MEN TO SILENCE

THAT WON'T BE A TOUGH SELL THE BOYS AREN'T EXACTLY **BRAGGING**.

AW, **JEEZ**...

...JEEZ LOUISE, WILL YOU LOOK AT THAT.

WHAT IS THIS? THE MILLION-BABE MARCH?

A CHEER-LEADING SQUAD

SUCH PURPOSELESS, POINTLESS LIVES SUCH A WASTE OF MATERIAL.

YOU'VE GOT A FUNNY WAY OF PUTTING THINGS DAMN FUNNY

YOUR INSTINCTS SERVE YOU POORLY, DETECTIVE IF YOU DON'T WANT ANSWERS, DON'T ASK QUESTIONS.

...

STAY IN THE DARK YOU'LL BE HAPPIER THERE

I KNEW YOU'D PAY AS SOON AS YOU **COULD.** WALLACE I NEVER DOUBTED YOU FOR A **SECOND.**

I SWEAR, I'VE NEVER **SEEN** YOU SO **JUMPY.** IS EVERYTHING ALL **RIGHT?**

EVERYTHING'S **FINE,** MA'AM I'M JUST IN A **HURRY.** I'VE GOT TO CATCH A TRAIN OUT OF TOWN

I'M NOT SURE HOW LONG I'LL BE GONE

TAKING A LITTLE **VACATION?** MAYBE WITH A CERTAIN **YOUNG LADY** WHOSE **LIFE** YOU SAVED?

I WISH I WERE

YOU COULD **ASK** HER **IT NEVER HURTS TO ASK.** YOU **DID** GET HER **PHONE NUMBER,** DIDN'T YOU?

I WISH I HAD

SILLY BOY TOO **SHY** FOR YOUR OWN **GOOD.**

FOLLOW ME

YOU DON'T ARGUE WITH MRS MENDOZA. YOU JUST DON'T

SHE FUMBLES THROUGH HER BUREAU, HUMMING AND SHAKING HER HIPS IN TIME WITH A SALSA TUNE COMING FROM HER RADIO

I GET TWITCHY AS LONG AS I'M STILL HERE - SHE'S NOT ***SAFE.***

UH, MA'AM

YOU KEEP YOUR ***SHIRT*** ON, BOY.

HERE YOU GO.

IT'S A GOOD THING ***ONE*** OF US WAS WEARING HER ***THINKING CAP,*** EH?

ESTHER'S AN ***ACTRESS.*** LOOKING FOR ***WORK.***

SO SHE'S GOT A ***BUSINESS CARD.***

IT'S ALL ***HERE.*** RIGHT ***HERE.*** RIGHT ON HER ***BUSINESS CARD.***

HER ***FULL NAME.*** HER ***PHONE NUMBER.*** HER ***ADDRESS.***

HER ***ADDRESS.***

YOU'RE A *GODSEND!*

WOOF!

SHE WAS *RIGHT.* I WAS *JUMPY.*

BUT NOW I'VE GOT ESTHER'S *ADDRESS.* NOW I'VE GOT A *LEAD.*

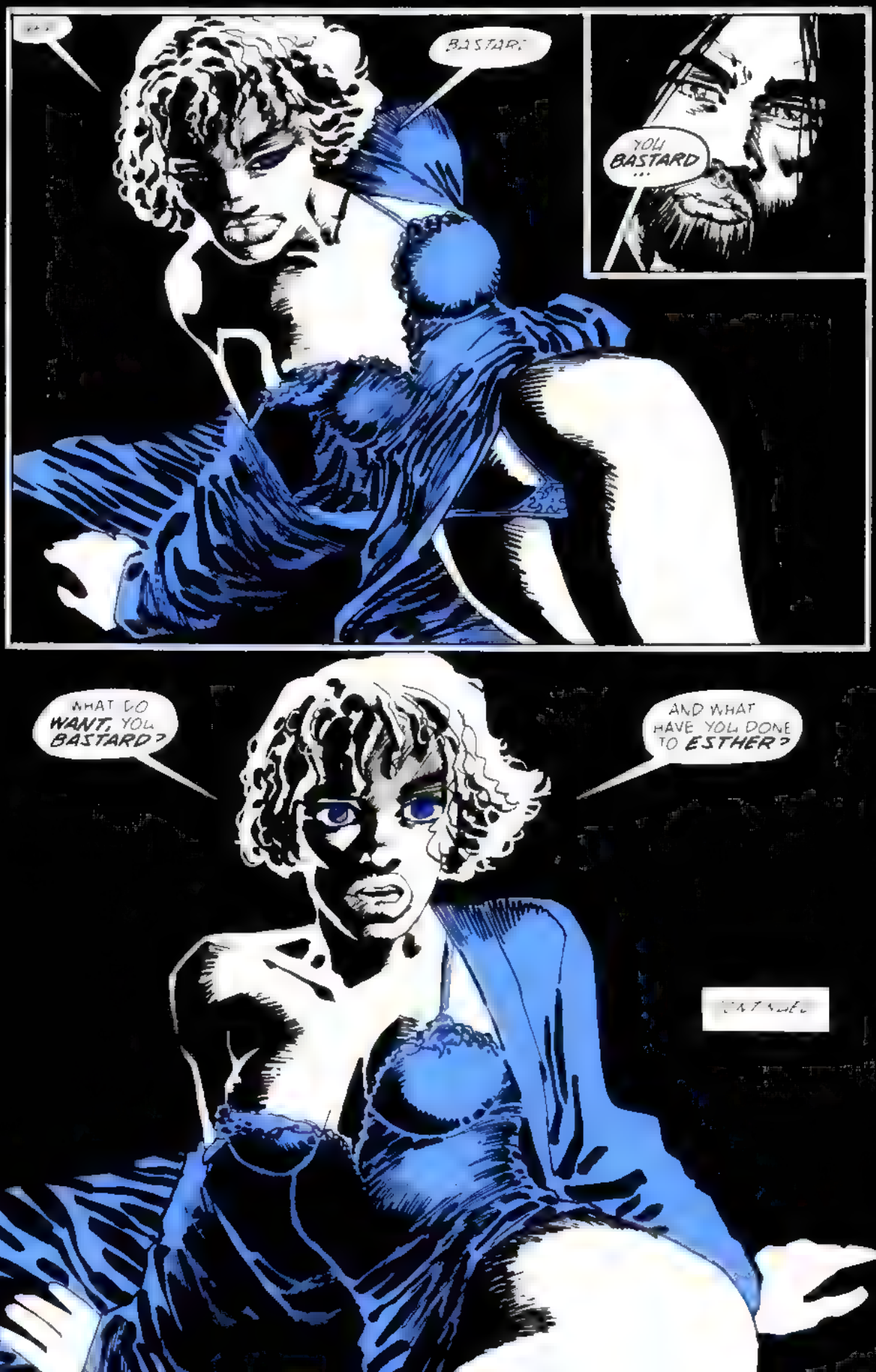
NOW I'M *CALM.*

CALM AS A *MONK.*

OR AN *EXECUTIONER.*

THE NIGHT TURNS *COLD.*

SO DOES MY *STOMACH.*


BASTARD!
YOU BASTARD ...
WHAT DO WANT, YOU BASTARD?
AND WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO ESTHER?

How about that Congress of ours? A couple of sociopathic kids shoot the hell out of their fellow students, and, in the wake of this horror, our elected House of Representatives bickers over modest gun-control legislation and sweeping, censorious plans to castrate entertainment. The result? A doomed-to-die-aborning resolution to allow the Ten Commandments to be posted in schoolrooms. And, eager to stop an epidemic of flag burning that exists only in their poll-soaked heads, they pitch an equally doomed Constitutional Amendment that would rob the precious symbol of exactly what makes it precious.

What a pack of clowns.

At least they flopped on their efforts to censor us (though I'm hearing that DC Comics, ever the first to hoist a white kerchief on a stick, is calling back to its offices finished, ready-to-publish pages, to soften their comics up, just in case the big, bad world might notice we're doing something that might raise somebody's blood pressure).

But, still, the Representatives flopped at their latest censorship bill. They went face down, and the First Amendment survives. To fight another day. And another.

The next time you hear somebody complain about our "do-nothing" Congress, count your blessings. Pray for gridlock. Larry, Curly, and Moe are best left bopping each other and keeping their pandering mitts off the Constitution.

Editor Diana Schutz circulated some advance copies of *Hell and Back* #1 to provide us with something to fill this page. She obviously caught you folks in a generous mood . . .

Jim Pipik
Cleveland, OH

A knockout dame literally on the edge, a misunderstood soul with a black belt, macho cars and smoky bars, a vast conspiracy lurking in the shadows, and a cliffhanger on the final page: just another night in Sin City. If this territory is so well trod, why does it seem so fresh?

For me, what made *Sin City* so original when Frank Miller first cut the Big Two's apron strings and ran off with Marv and Goldie ten years ago is still what makes the book work: the black-and-white. No offense to Lynn Varley's beautiful work in *300*, but Miller cooks sans color. His deceptively simple and shockingly innovative technique creates mood beyond the wildest dreams of film noir. And like the best directors, Miller uses the iconic force of black-and-white to create characters that, while retaining their individuality, become somewhat more than themselves, transforming into archetypes of some nightmare urban mythology.

While I resort to film-speak for a vocabulary appropriate to Miller's insistently visual approach to storytelling, his work is uniquely comics. The deliberate, solemn pace of Esther's sacramental pre-leap ministrations, the time-bending Eisneresque meta-pages of Wallace's flashbacks, the balance of the impact of full-page panels, and the rapid fire of multi-panel movement: all examples of Miller's control over the comics repertoire.

But Miller is not content with Faulknerian tour de force. The scratchy, imprecise line work and occasionally uneven proportions (the most common complaints I hear of Miller's work) lend *Sin City* a level of manic energy that keeps it from becoming a polished display of pen-and-ink sleight of hand.

(Only complaint: the wasted opportunity of building up dramatic tension about the evil paramedic corps through a page of Miller's typically improbable but graphically interesting silhouettes, only to have their fairly nondescript faces unceremoniously revealed in a tiny, fully lit panel on the next page.)

It's too early to say much about Wallace and Esther, except that *he* may be the closest thing to a standard comic-book hero Sin City has ever seen, and, as Wallace suspects, *she* probably is too good to be true—though of course that won't stop him from moving heaven and earth to help her.

Finally, something I've wanted to address for a long time: so what? Why bother with Miller's forays into the tawdry lives of the lost dames and tarnished heroes of Sin City? Simply put, does this stuff matter?

I would suggest that we've all known somebody out on the ledge at some point in our lives and that we all have to summon up whatever resources we can to reach out to them, even if we know that the world is against us and we'll likely fail, and even if we succeed, we'll probably end up hurt. If seeing Wallace say "No!" to Esther throwing away life and promise bestows the least strength to a reader struggling to make a positive difference in our own at best indifferent and too often dangerous world, then *Sin City* matters.

Barry Wolborsky
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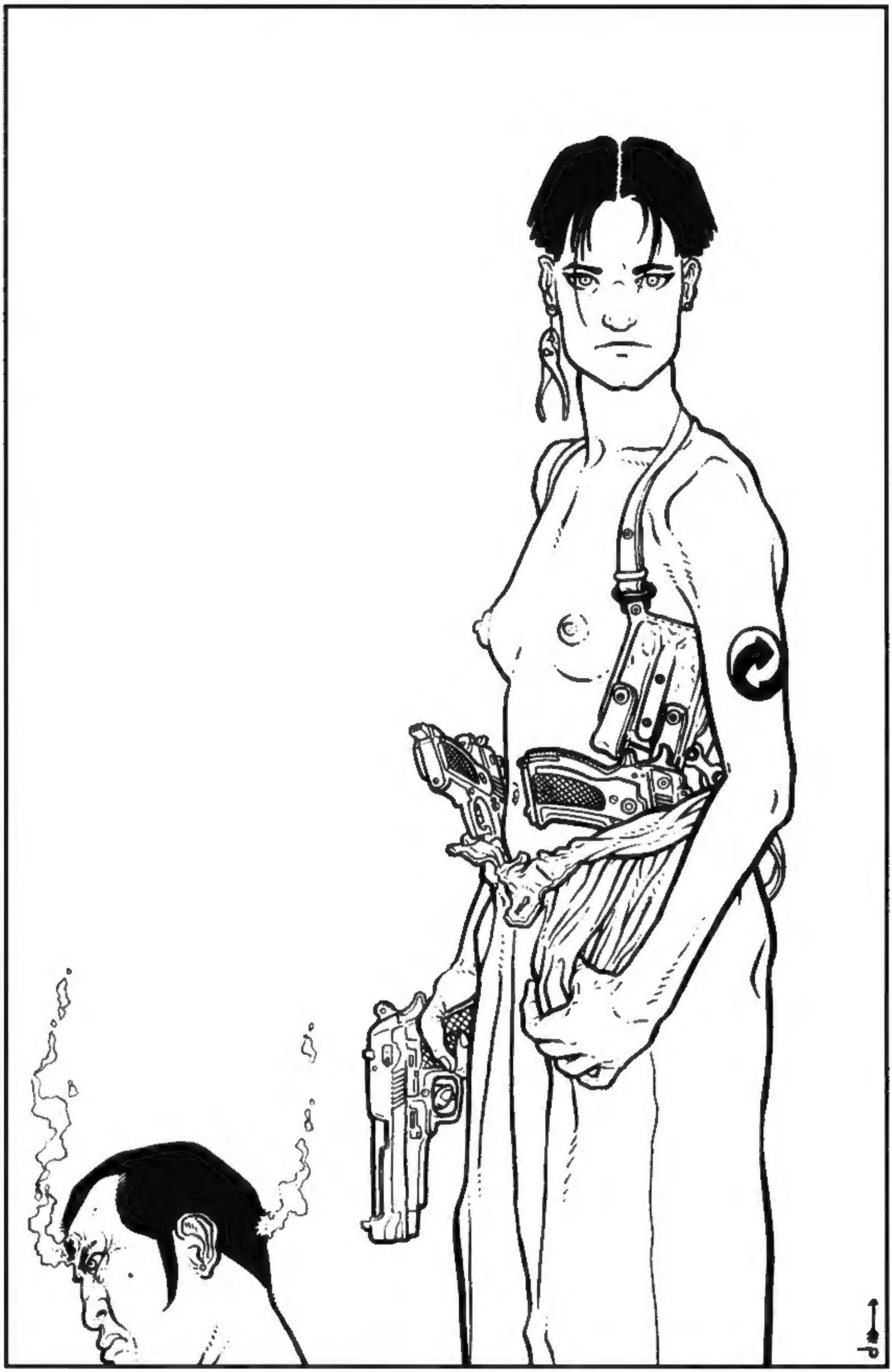
I loved the *Hell and Back* logo design. Very different from the previous *Sin City* logos that I've seen. I especially like the fact that it states on the cover that it's a love story. Many of the *Sin City* stories that I have read have at their core a love story amongst the action and violence, and this continues that tradition. Lynn Varley's colors on the cover were just beautiful, and since the issue is all black-and-white, they stand out even more so.

Now for the interior of the book. The black-and-white art, especially the first few full pages, was simply stunning, and it's some of the most striking work I can recall seeing from Frank in either black-and-white or color. We know nothing of Esther at first, other than the fact that she's beautiful, yet deeply troubled about something, though we're not sure just what. All that from just a few pages with no dialogue whatsoever. Great stuff. I also liked our introduction to Wallace, describing a cool summer night while driving in his convertible, thinking about how he's going to pay the rent. He's a struggling artist who is trying to maintain his integrity, artistic or otherwise, despite the fact that he is forced to paint nude women for what must be something particularly sleazy. Not only that, but he's heroic as well, saving Esther's life without a second thought, and it turns out that he received the Congressional Medal of Honor, even though, according to Wallace, "Anybody else would've done the same." He appears to be very heroic, and both he and Esther are instantly likable characters right from the start. I have a feeling that Esther is much more than your typical damsel in distress. Maybe she has got a secret past that's catching up to her or is a part of something she can't get out of. Either way, I'm interested in finding out, as well as interested in finding out what Wallace did to earn his Medal and what his backstory is. We're also left wondering who those two mysterious men watching Wallace save Esther were, and who the "Colonel" is. I'm easily left wanting more, especially with that cliffhanger of a last page, and I'm thankful to be along for Frank's latest ride to *Hell and Back*!

NEXT ISSUE: The plot thickens. Or quickens. Or just plain sickens, depending on your point of view.

— FM



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geof **DARROW**

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